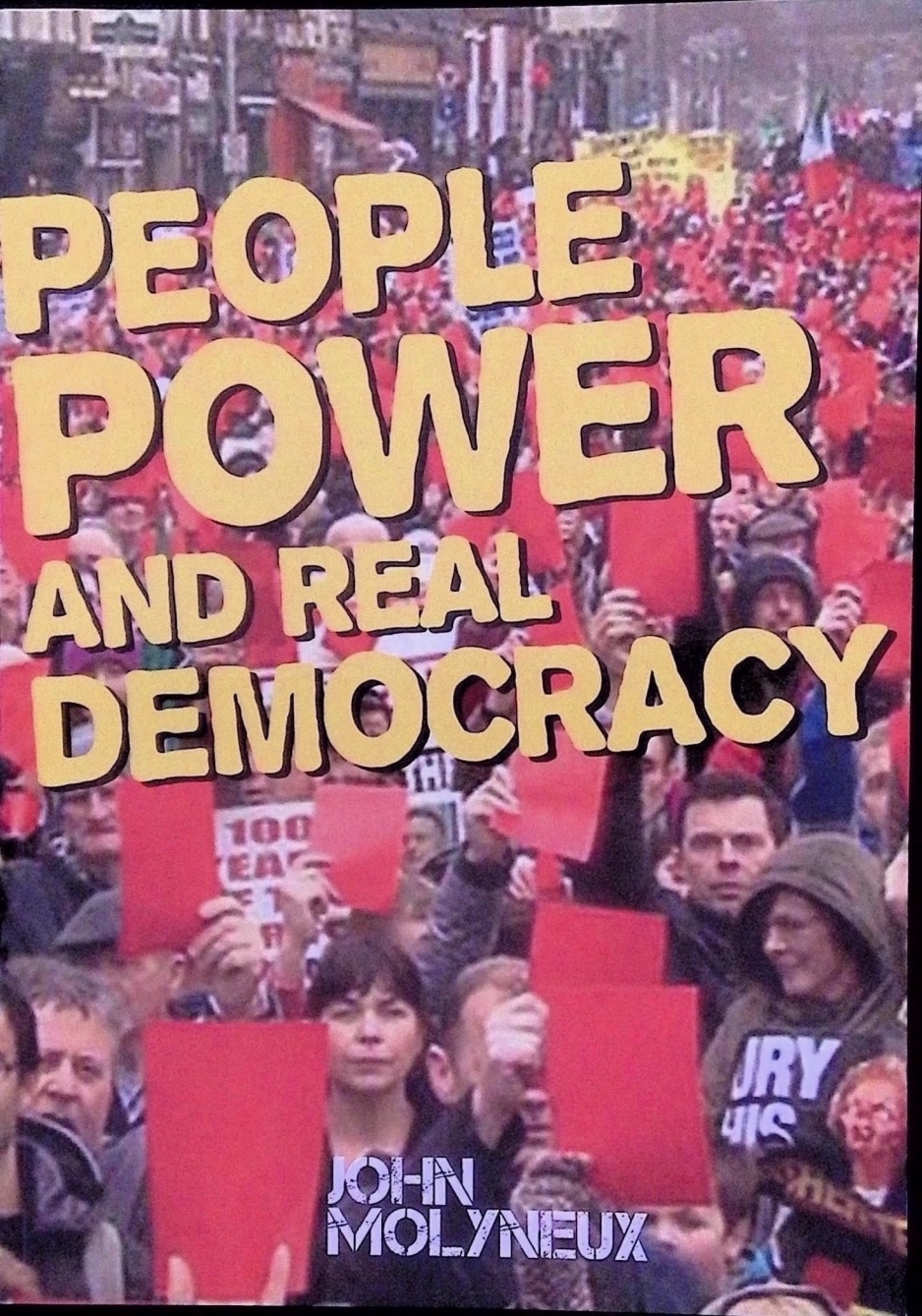


A large crowd of people at a protest, many holding red signs. The background shows a city street with buildings and more protesters. The text is overlaid on the image in a bold, yellow, blocky font with a black outline.

PEOPLE POWER AND REAL DEMOCRACY

JOHN
MOLYNEUX

PEOPLE POWER AND REAL DEMOCRACY

**'ENDA IN YOUR IVORY TOWER
THIS IS CALLED PEOPLE
POWER!'**

(Popular chant on the water charges protests)

ANYONE who has participated in the great people's revolt against the water charges, in blocking the installation of water meters in their area, in the magnificent 100,000 strong demonstration on 11 October, in the even larger local demonstrations of 1 November, the huge assembly of 100,000 at the Dáil on the working day of 10 December or in many other local actions and assemblies, has had a taste of people power. And they will know how good it feels – people standing up at last!

Water is a human right and the water charges are fundamentally unjust but, as everyone knows, the revolt has not just been about water. Water charges are the final straw after six years of making people pay for the debts, follies, and crimes of the bankers and the rest of the rich.

The protests are an expression of people's accumulated anger over wage cuts, job losses, housing shortages, cutbacks, extra charges and the whole rotten system. Never, in the history of the state, has there been such disillusionment with the whole political establishment.

This pamphlet argues that in the people power that has been seen on the streets and in the meeting halls of Ireland in the autumn of 2014 lies the seeds of a fundamentally different politics – a new system based on real democracy and accountability instead of the corrupt dictatorship of the rich masquerading as democracy that we have at the moment.



THE ROTTEN SYSTEM

PEOPLE are furious with politicians. And let's be clear – their rage is justified. People feel let down, betrayed, tricked and robbed. They have been.

Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael – the two parties that have dominated Irish politics for the last eighty years – are a disgrace.

For a long time most Irish working class people voted Fianna Fáil because of its republican past, its roots in the community and its populist talk. But Fianna Fáil abused people's trust and turned into a den of corruption and cronyism symbolised by Charlie Haughey, Bertie Aherne and the Galway Tent.

When the Celtic Tiger was roaring they abandoned all attempts at regulation and used their power to enrich themselves and their banker and developer friends. When the Tiger crashed in 2008 they used their power to bailout the bankers, protect the rich bondholders and shift the burden of debt onto ordinary people.

Fine Gael promised change – they even talked of 'a political revolution' – but when they got in in 2011 it was just more of the same. If anything they were even harder on working class people with more austerity, cuts and charges, while continuing the stroke politics and cronyism with ministers like Alan Shatter and James Reilly.

For working class people the betrayal by the Labour Party is even harder to swallow. Fine Gael was always and clearly a party of the rich and the upper middle classes but Labour was founded by James Connolly and supposed to represent the interests of workers. In 2011 it campaigned on the basis that it would protect people from the brutal austerity policies of Fine Gael and the Troika 'It's Frankfurt's way or Labour's way' said Eamon

Gilmore. But when they went into coalition with Fine Gael they forgot all that.

The fact that in the past other small parties have followed the same route from fine words to foul deeds – the Greens in coalition with Fianna Fáil and the Workers Party collapsing into Labour – contributes to the feeling that 'they are all the same'. The betrayal by the leaders of the Workers Party was particularly damaging because the party had built a real network of working class activists.

Then there is the question of Sinn Féin. Sinn Féin have risen spectacularly in the polls recently as they have mounted strong attacks on the Government from the left with spokespersons like Marie Lou McDonald doing a good job of expressing how people feel. But there are two big question marks over Sinn Féin. One is that they don't seem fully on board with the people's movement from below – over the water charges they had to run to catch up with the protests – and sometimes it looks like they just turn up for the photo opportunity. The second is their record in the North. In the North Sinn Féin, in coalition with the DUP, are implementing austerity and cuts (including the installation of 30,000 water meters) on a massive scale.

This raises the serious prospect that if Sinn Féin gets into government they may form a coalition with Fianna Fáil or others and go the same way as Labour, the Workers Party and the Greens, namely sell out the people who elected them.

This leaves the Independents and the Left like the Anti-Austerity Alliance and People Before Profit. Independents are popular at the moment, for obvious reasons – they are not FF, FG or Labour – but the problem is being an 'independent' only tells you what someone isn't, not what they are. So there are there some 'independents' like Clare Daly who have a real record of fighting with and for working people but there are others like Michael Healy-Rae (and Jackie Healy-Rae before him) and Lucinda Creighton who are really just semi-detached Fianna Fáilers and Fine Gaelers.

The genuine left – the AAA and People Before Profit – are significantly different. This is shown by their record in the struggle over the Household Charges and the Water Charges and many other campaigns – by what they do as well as what they say. But even we can't just say to people 'Trust us, vote for us and we'll make things better. We won't go the way of Pat Rabbitte and Eamon Gilmore'.

There needs to be an explanation of why so many politicians have betrayed people and there needs to be a different politics based on people power so that representatives who sell out are held accountable and removed.



Joan phones home

A FAKE DEMOCRACY

WE are always told in Ireland and internationally that we live in a democracy; that the people rule (the word democracy means rule by the people) by freely electing the government on the basis of one person one vote.

But it doesn't work – in reality the rich and the elite always come out on top. This is not just the case in Ireland but in the US, Britain, France, Germany and so on. This is not just because of bad or corrupt politicians; it goes deeper than that to the whole nature of the system.

There are three basic problems with parliamentary democracy as it now exists and they apply as much to the US Congress, the UK Parliament, and the German Reichstag as they do to Dáil Éireann.

1 Real power is not in Leinster House (or the US Congress etc). The story we are told in school, by the media and the politicians themselves is that we elect a government to run the country. But this is just a façade. Politicians, and particularly the leading government ministers, do have some power but ultimately it is much less than two other groups of people: big business, bankers, financiers etc and those who run the state (army, police, judges, top officials etc).

The Dáil is a talking shop. Precisely because of this it can be and is used by some TDs like Richard Boyd Barrett, Clare Daly and Paul Murphy, to

raise issues and put the people's case, and that's very helpful, but the Dáil doesn't really run the country. The key decisions, decisions about production and investment, finance and the economy, are not made in the Dáil, or even the cabinet, but in the boardrooms of the corporations and banks – by 'the markets' as they are conveniently called to make them seem anonymous. And in a capitalist system they are made on the basis of **profit** not human need.

As they say, when anyone suggests taxing the rich or the corporations – they will just take their money out of the country. This acknowledges that these people care only about their profits and not about the needs of the people. 'Tax our wealth and we are off! Never mind where that leaves schools or hospitals or the poor.'

And while we elect TDs we do not elect the heads of corporations or banks. There is absolutely nothing democratic about their power. However they are able to use that power to undermine and systematically pervert our so-called 'parliamentary democracy' in their interests.

They do this not only by bribing individual politicians and political parties (though this certainly happens) but also by their close ties to the heads of the state apparatus with whom they share the same background and outlook and have a multitude of connections so that judges, police and army chiefs and senior civil servants serve them and protect them rather than serving the ordinary people. No matter what it says in the constitution there is always one law for the rich and another for the poor. Bankers don't go to jail!

2 The economic power of the rich also undermines the election process itself. Elections in Ireland and elsewhere are 'free' in that you can vote for whom you like and the results are not generally rigged. But they are not 'fair' or 'equal' because money plays a huge role in

"And while we elect TDs we do not elect the heads of corporations or banks. There is absolutely nothing democratic about their power."



Old cronies

every election. Posters, leaflets, meeting rooms etc – all the paraphernalia and materials of elections – cost money and the parties that represent the interests of the rich have enormously more resources than those that fight for working people. This makes a huge difference. In America this is pushed to an extreme so that without big corporate backing it is virtually impossible to run a national presidential campaign but it still applies in Ireland. Clearly the likes of Denis O'Brien, Dermot Desmond and Michael O'Leary are not going to donate to the People Before Profit election fund.

Even more importantly the right wing parties have the media on their side. The bias of the media is always somewhat disguised. RTE, for example is supposed to be neutral, but in reality they constantly send out the message that only the 'mainstream' parties are to be taken seriously and that any alternative is just unrealistic fantasy if not downright wicked.

This is not just a question of direct comment at election time but of the general climate of opinion they foster and create all the year round. The media may well allow Fine Gael and the 'opposition' Fianna Fail to knock lumps off each other about who is better at running the system but they always encourage the view that the present system itself is inevitable, and that there is nothing that can be done about it.

3 This is all made worse by the absence of accountability. Once they are elected TDs are not seriously accountable to those who elected them for the next five years. This leads to the well known 'Pat Rabbitte syndrome' where 'what you do at elections' is make promises and what you do after is break them, and there is nothing the electorate can do about it till it's far too late.

Here the key problem is that in the present system people vote as separate isolated individuals and not as part of any collective discussion or meeting and this leaves them powerless to hold TDs accountable between elections.

Actually, behind the scenes, the super-rich do have means of controlling 'their' TDs and keeping them accountable (to the rich). They have all sorts of 'incentives' and inducements and jobs for the boys they can offer or withdraw at will but ordinary people obviously do not have any of these available to them.

All these factors combine to ensure that the system as a whole, far from working in the interests of the majority, consistently serves the better off and above all the super-rich millionaires and billionaires who control major economic resources. Rather than being called democracy it should be called **capitalist democracy** – democracy for the capitalists.

This cannot be remedied just by electing better or more honest TDs. It needs a fundamentally different system. This is where people power comes in.



*Right2Water local
assembly in Drimmagh*

PEOPLE POWER AND REAL DEMOCRACY

THE people power that has developed in Ireland over the last few months has had a number of elements to it.

First there was the resistance to water metering in working class estates such as Clondalkin, Edenmore and Coolock. Often this began with street meetings outside people's homes and then led to blocking installation of water metres early in the mornings. People just got together and organised themselves forming networks and telephone trees in their neighbourhoods.

Then came the great demonstration of the 11 October when 100,000 or more marched through the centre of Dublin. This was called by the national Right2Water campaign which is an alliance involving five trade unions, People Before Profit (who helped take the initiative in setting it up), Sinn Féin, the Anti-Austerity Alliance, and various other political and community groups and left TDs. This shows that some political leadership is needed to provide a focus but there is no doubt that the driving force on the day was the massive turnout from local working class communities across the country which took everyone, including the organisers, by surprise. It was this that gave the march its spontaneous carnival-like character so different from a top-down bureaucratically controlled demonstration.

Then there were many local assemblies to decide what to do next. Some people, especially the Dublin Says No group, wanted a repeat demo in Dublin city centre. Others, including Right2Water, argued for local demonstrations. In the end both happened on 1 November but it was the

local demonstrations tactic that ultimately predominated with extraordinary turnouts in virtually every area of Dublin from Blanchardstown to Dundrum and virtually every town in the state from Letterkenny to Wexford.

Since then there have more Local Assemblies, many very big, to plan and build for the National Assembly at the Dáil on 10 December. On the 10th itself the crowd was too large and too awkwardly distributed and the weather too cold to allow for real debate but proposals were put to the people for their endorsement and those proposals included a call for more local assemblies in the January feeding into a proper delegate based national assembly in February. Also a number of the platform speakers on the day, especially Shay Lestrane from Crumlin Says No and Richard Boyd Barrett TD of People Before Profit, spoke explicitly about developing new models of democracy.

Certain characteristics of the movement have been particularly striking throughout. First and foremost its working class composition. There is nothing wrong with middle class people or students taking part in demonstrations but it is an observable fact that from the resistance on the estates onwards this has primarily been a mobilization of the working class and the manual working class at that.

Then there is its collective, community character. It is clear that in many areas whole working class communities have made collective decisions to oppose the water charges. This doesn't mean every single person attends the demo or the local campaign meeting – of course that doesn't happen because people have lives to live – but those who do attend feel they are representing their whole community.

Finally there is its democratic bottom up character. One aspect of this was a degree of hostility in some parts of the campaign to all politics and all political parties. This was a weakness but it seems to have faded as the struggle has developed. However it is a strength of the movement that it is

"It is clear that in many areas whole working class communities have made collective decisions to oppose the water charges."



full of initiative from below and not willing to be simply led or said by any one party, trade union leader or other figure head. And at the local assemblies the grassroots do really get to debate issues and take decisions.

It is all these features of this movement that enable us to see in this rise of people power not only a highly effective way to fight the water charges but also the embryo of something much bigger: a different way of running society – a real democracy.

What we are talking about here is extending the principle of ordinary people gathering together in their communities to decide issues in the water charges campaign to doing the same thing in relation to wider issues in society. Of course it wouldn't be practical for these assemblies to discuss every detail of policy anymore than the Dáil or the Council can but they would be able to decide basic principles and priorities and we could be sure those priorities would be very different from the priorities of Enda Kenny.

Also such assemblies would be able to hold their TDs and other representatives to account and remove them if they broke their promises. Both Eamon Gilmore and Richard Boyd Barrett are TDs for Dun Laoghaire. Why should they not be answerable to a monthly or quarterly Dun Laoghaire People's Assembly? And why shouldn't the same apply to Pat Rabbitte TD and Paul Murphy TD in Dublin South West or to Cllr Brid Smith and Cllr Daithi Doolin in Balleyfermot/Drimnagh?

One obvious objection to this is that you wouldn't be able to fit all the people of Dublin South West into an assembly even in the largest hall or sports ground. But that could easily be overcome by having smaller local assemblies in Jobstown or Saggart or wherever, who elect recallable delegates to the Dublin South West Assembly. Also you would clearly need to have a national People's Assembly to decide the main national issues. But that would be straightforward too – Dun Laoghaire or Dublin South West would simply elect recallable delegates to the National Assembly. In fact that is what Richard Boyd Barrett or Paul Murphy would become if they were so chosen by the people.

What is important here is not the detailed arrangements which would be worked out by people themselves and depend on all sorts of concrete circumstances but the **principle** of a structure which is rooted among ordinary people with collective debate and discussion and accountability all the way up and all the way down.

There is another crucial factor that has to be taken into account. We have said that the Dáil, like other parliaments in capitalist democracy, is just a talking shop because it doesn't control the major economic resources of the country which are in the hands of big business. The same would apply to any system of People's Assemblies if they didn't establish their control of

the economy.

To do this they would have to take the main corporations and major industries (not every corner shop and small trader) into public ownership and they would have to place them under the control of their workers. If this were not done the likes of Denis O'Brien, Dermot Desmond and Michael O'Leary would either use their wealth and power to undermine the new system, which they certainly would hate, or try to take all of their money out of the country and sabotage it that way.

Public ownership of the main industries would make it possible to plan the economy and provide full employment and decent housing, education and health care for all. People's assemblies and workers control would ensure that this planning and social ownership was genuinely democratic. It would be real **democratic** socialism not the kind of bureaucratic dictatorship that existed in Russia and Eastern Europe. There's no reason why it shouldn't be combined with real freedom of speech and debate and different political groups or parties competing for influence within the assemblies.

Let's just explore a bit further the idea of workers' control of workplaces which is very unfamiliar in this society. In this society almost all workplaces are run hierarchically and there is no democracy at work, only managers and bosses. But the fact that something doesn't exist now doesn't mean it could never happen.

To see how it would work consider a school – an institution we all know. To run a school under workers' control you would first have an assembly of those who work in and use the school - teachers, students, support staff plus parents and community representatives. This assembly could then elect a management team ensuring teacher/pupil/support staff / parent etc representation and they would run the school appointing people to specific tasks (organising the Maths department or whatever).

The same approach could be applied to hospitals (with a team of doctors, nurses, staff, users etc), to supermarkets, factories and any large scale workplace. Once again it is not the specific detail that is important but the principle.

Of course all the establishment politicians and most of the professional journalists and TV pundits would scoff at all this and dismiss it as fantasy just as they dismissed as fantasy any idea that the Irish people should burn the bondholders or not pay for the debts of the bankers. Most of them don't

**"In this society
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believe that ordinary people are capable of running either their work places or society just as back in the day the same sort of people thought that black people wouldn't cope with not being slaves or that society would fall apart if ordinary people had the vote or that Ireland wouldn't manage if it wasn't ruled by England.

But think about it! Isn't it the people who actually do the work who know best how that work should be organised? Wouldn't hospitals run by doctors and nurses be better than hospitals run by overpaid managers appointed by James Reilly and Leo Varadkar?

And wouldn't ordinary people make better decisions about keeping water as a human right, fixing the leaks, funding disadvantaged schools and housing the homeless than Enda Kenny, Denis O'Brien and Joan Burton?



**Sinn Fein in the North -
spot the difference**



EXAMPLES OF PEOPLE POWER

MAKING the case for people power and real democracy would be much easier if we could simply say look how well it works in China or Sweden or Italy or other places; why don't we copy them.

Unfortunately we live in a thoroughly capitalist world and the rich and the corporations dominate pretty much everywhere. This is why the world is such a messed up place with 368 billionaires owning as much wealth as the bottom half of the world's population and the planet careering towards climate disaster and environmental destruction.

But this doesn't mean there haven't been many examples of real people power from which we can learn and which prove that democracy and equality are not pipedreams.

In March 2011, inspired by the Revolution that overthrew the dictator Mubarak in Egypt, a huge people's movement erupted in Spain. Hundreds of thousands of mainly young people occupied Puerta del Sol, the main square in Madrid, followed by Placa Catalunya, the main square in Barcelona and then many others across the country. One of the main issues that provoked this was a desperate housing crisis and evictions but it was also driven by a general anger at the political elite and a demand for something better. 'They don't represent us!' and 'Real democracy now!' were the movements two main slogans.

The movement became known at the *indignados* – the indignant – and it tried to practice the direct democracy it preached through making its decisions at mass democratic assemblies in the Squares. When, eventually, the occupiers were forced to leave the squares these democratic people's assemblies continued in the local areas.

At the beginning the movement was very anti-politics and opposed to all political parties but as time passed this changed and people saw the need for a political alternative. Early in 2014 they formed a new radical party called Podemos ('We Can') which, amazingly, topped a recent opinion poll. It has transformed the Spanish political landscape.

In the autumn of 2011 the example of the *indignados*, including the practice of mass democratic assemblies, was taken up by the Occupy movement in America.

For a while, until it was brutally dispersed by the US police, it had an electrifying effect both in America and internationally and succeeded in popularising the idea of 'the 1%' which is a very good way of describing the tiny minority of super-rich who dominate in Ireland, the US and the world.

However the *indignados* and Occupy are only recent instances of traditions of people power and genuine democracy that stretch right back to the dawn of history. For at least 90% of human history, from about 100,000 years ago, when modern humans first appeared, to about 10,000 years ago when agriculture developed, people everywhere lived in conditions of basic democracy and equality.

This was the epoch of hunting and gathering. People lived in small nomadic groups or clans of about 40 or so and lived off animals they hunted or food they could gather moving continually from place to place within a certain large area. No individual or group accumulated more property than they could carry on their backs and there was no division into rich and poor or rulers and ruled. Women were also much more equal to men than they were later in history. Decision making in these clans was on the basis of collective discussion and consensus. Some people, particularly elders, may have had more influence than others but no one was leader or dictator.

For at least 90% of human history, from about 100,000 years ago, when modern humans first appeared, to about 10,000 years ago when agriculture developed, people everywhere lived in conditions of basic democracy and equality.

Hunter gatherer societies with their basic democracy started to be displaced about 10,000 years ago with the development of agriculture. This brought with it the accumulation of wealth and property – for some – while others were forced to work for them as peasants or slaves. The rich then developed armies, police, prisons and laws to protect their privileges. This led to the kind of tyrannical societies like Egypt, Rome and China, with their Pharaohs, emperors and slaves that we know from the Ancient world.

These aggressive empires overwhelmed and drove out the democratic hunter gatherer societies but these early democracies didn't disappear completely. They survived in less accessible places such as among the Inuit (Eskimos), Native Americans, Amazon tribes, Australian Aborigines, South Pacific islands and many parts of central and southern Africa until they were encountered and conquered by modern capitalism in the 19th and 20th centuries. Then they were studied by various anthropologists which is how we know of their existence today.

Interestingly a form of this early democracy survived until the twentieth century here in Ireland on the Blasket Islands off the Kerry coast [It can be read about in *An tOileánach (The Islandman)* by Tomás Ó Criomhthain and *Fiche Bliain ag Fás (Twenty Years A-Growing)* by Muiris Ó Súilleabhain] and on the remote island of St.Kilda off the west coast of Scotland. Unfortunately modern capitalism is such a dominating and all encompassing system that these 'primitive' democracies were overwhelmed and did not survive.

They are not a model we can simply copy today in the world of planes, big cities and the internet but they remain important because they show that real equality and democracy are not at all contrary to human nature as is so often claimed.

Another historical example is the democracy in Ancient Athens in the 5th century BC. Again this is not at all a model we should follow today because it was a system that excluded slaves (the main workforce) and women (Ancient Greece was very much male dominated). Nevertheless 20-30,000 adult male citizens attended the Assemblies which met at least ten times a year and voted on the main issues facing the city. Given that Athens produced one of the great civilizations in human history this shows what is possible.

Much more recent and much more of a guide for us today is the radical democratic experiment that occurred in Paris in 1871. This began on 18 March when the people of Paris, mainly from the working class districts of Montmartre and Belleville, rose up and marched on the Town Hall (Hotel de Ville) in the city centre where they occupied and set up a new government. It was called the Paris Commune. The Commune was based on very democratic principles. Its members were elected on the basis of one man

one vote and were to be subject to recall and paid only the average workers' wage.

The Commune immediately adopted a number of radical measures some of which would be very useful in Ireland today. These decrees included:

The separation of church and state and the end of teaching religion in schools

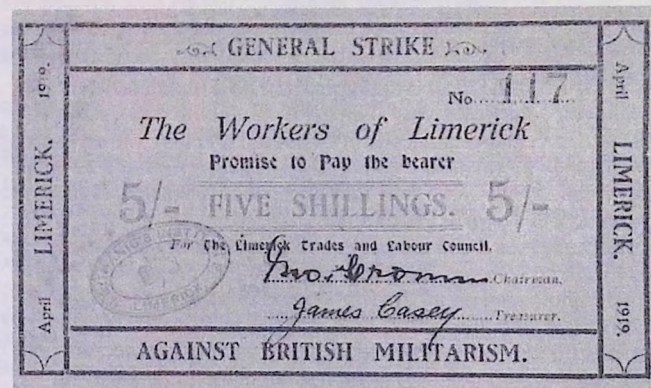
The cancellation of rent arrears

The abolition of night work in Paris bakeries

The right of employees to take over and run enterprises deserted by their owners

The prohibition of fines imposed by bosses on their workers

The abolition of the death penalty



Limerick Soviet Currency

The Commune lasted only 74 days until 28 May 1871. What ended it was not that it didn't work but that it only existed in one city and this allowed it to be crushed by an alliance of the old French government with the rulers of Germany (Bismarck and Kaiser Wilhelm I). They formed an army which invaded Paris from the old Royal Palace of Versailles and slaughtered the Communards. In one week 30,000 working people were killed on the streets of Paris. The fact that both this terrible massacre and the democratic socialist experiment that preceded it are so little talked about shows how reluctant our rulers are for us to know this history.

After the Paris Commune the next great experiment in people power

came in the Russian Revolution of 1917. Given the way things ended up in Russia in a horrible police state and Stalinist dictatorship this may seem surprising but actually the Revolution began profoundly democratically. In 1917 there emerged, along with the overthrow of the Tsar, first in the capital, St.Petersburg, and then right across Russia, workers' councils or assemblies. These councils were called soviets simply because soviet was the Russian word for council. Later the word soviet became part of the name of the state (the Soviet Union) but the Russian state of the 1930s no more represented the principles of 1917 than the Irish state in the 1930s or today represents the spirit of James Connolly and the Easter Rising.

'All power to the Soviets (councils)' was the central slogan and theme of the Revolution and it established a government that was responsible to the National Congress of Soviets (councils). One of the things that distinguished these Russian councils was that they were made up of delegates from workplaces – there were many huge factories in St. Petersburg at this time – and from army and navy regiments, because Russia was involved in the First World War and had a huge conscript army which was in revolt against the war. The full name for the councils was Soviets of Workers, Soldiers and Sailors Deputies. And they were based on the same principles of recallability and officials getting a worker's wage as the Paris Commune. They were therefore exceptionally flexible, democratic and responsive to the views of the people.

Also like the Commune the workers' councils immediately adopted a series of very radical decrees. They took Russia out of the horror of the First World War and called on all the warring countries to make peace. They shared out the land, previously monopolized by Russia's big landowners, among the ordinary peasants. They established workers' control of industrial enterprises and legislated for complete equality for women. Interestingly they also, in December 1917, decriminalized homosexuality, **long** before other countries such as Britain, the US or Ireland (where this didn't happen till 1993).

Tragically all the main western countries combined with old Tsarist generals to invade Russia in 1919 and unleash a deadly civil war which utterly devastated the Russian economy and more or less destroyed the Russian working class who had created the workers' councils and made the 1917 Revolution. It was in these terrible circumstances that Stalin and a new class of bureaucrats were able to seize power and set up the awful dictatorship that lasted till its collapse in 1989-91.

Before that, however, the idea of workers' councils or soviets was very popular and a source of inspiration to millions around the world. In the years following the Russian Revolution workers councils sprang up in Germany, Italy and elsewhere including Ireland.

In the course of the Irish War of Independence, as part of the people's struggle against the British Empire and oppressive employers, workers' soviets (they used the Russian word) were declared in over a hundred places. Many of these were factory or workplace occupations, especially in creameries, but in Limerick in April 1919, in response to the British putting the town under martial law, the whole city was run as a soviet/ workers council for two weeks. They even issued their own temporary currency.

Just as the Paris Commune is barely mentioned in standard French and European history so the Irish Soviets have largely been written out of Irish history but for anyone who wants to find out more about them there is a great TG4 documentary, *Soviet na hÉireann* on Youtube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ADgvl0QOHhY>.

Since then there have been many other cases in different parts of the world of people starting to organize people power through people's assemblies or councils while they were rebelling against an unjust government or regime. Examples include Hungary in 1956 in a revolution against Russian Stalinist rule, Chile in 1972 at the time of a left wing Popular Unity government headed by Salvador Allende, Portugal in its revolution against fascism in 1974-75 and in the Iranian Revolution of 1979 against the brutal American backed Shah of Iran.

Thus we see that real democracy based on people power has been a long standing aspiration of many people in many different countries. Indeed we can say that whenever ordinary people rise up and seriously challenge the existing system on the basis of people power and truly mass action they need to organize themselves and they tend to do that in a very democratic way through people's assemblies in one form or another.

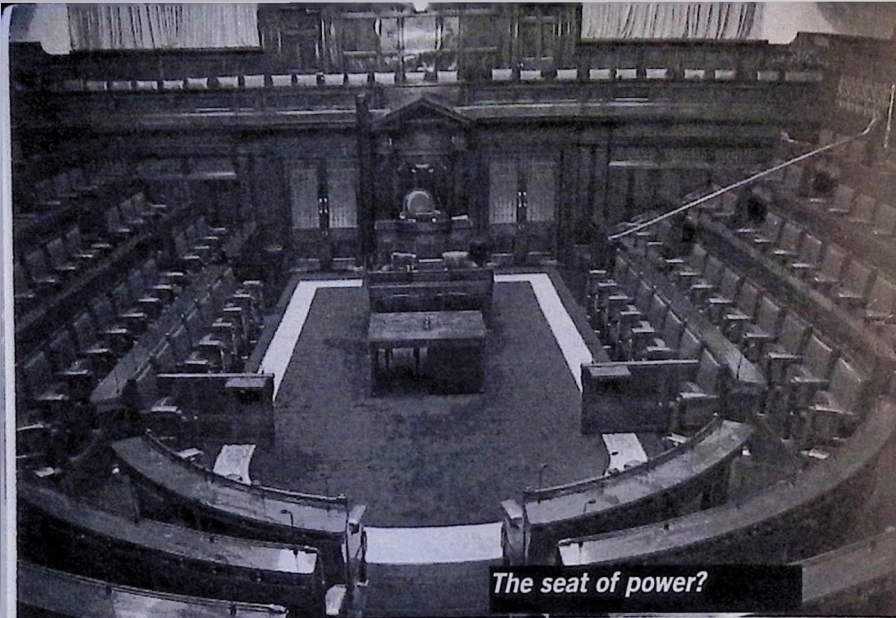
But from this whole experience one lesson stands out. No matter how popular or effective or democratic this people power is the existing rulers of society will not accept it or give way to it because it would threaten the very basis of their power and privileges. Therefore, if there is ever to be any real democracy it will have to be struggled for **politically**: we will have to deal with the matter of the government and the state.

This brings us to a question which is immediately relevant in Ireland today: can we get a genuine government of the left?

"Irish Soviets have largely been written out of Irish history"



Bruree Workers Soviet Mills – We Make Bread Not Profits



The seat of power?

WHAT ABOUT A LEFT GOVERNMENT?

A general election is due in Ireland by early 2016 at the latest. Because of the revolt over the water charges it is possible that the current Fine Gael/Labour government may fall long before then.

What is more it is clear that in any such election the government parties will be hammered. The problem is what is the alternative? Will we get a government that will not only scrap the water charges but will stop making working people pay for the crisis? In other words will we get a real left government?

An opinion poll published on December 4 shows Fine Gael on 19 %, Labour on 6%, Fianna Fail on 21%, Sinn Fein on 22% and Independents and others (which includes the left parties such as People Before Profit and the Anti-Austerity Alliance) on 32%. According to the political analyst Adrian Kavanagh this would be likely to lead to a Dáil made up as follows:

Fianna Fail 36, Fine Gael 32, Sinn Fein 36, Labour Party 0, Independents and Others 52.

79 seats are needed for a majority, so on this showing even Fianna Fail and Fine Gael combined would not have enough TDs to form a government. This clearly raises the possibility of a Sinn Fein led government of some sort another. But if Sinn Fein went into coalition with Fianna Fail, and the Sinn Fein leadership has not ruled this out, this would not be a government of the left. It is not just that Fianna Fail is corrupt and incompetent; it is completely tied into the existing system and those who benefit from it. There is no chance it would accept policies that went against its rich backers or seriously challenged how Ireland is run.

What then of a government formed by Sinn Fein and Independents? There is no doubt that many ordinary people would welcome this as a step forward after decades of Fianna Fail and Fine Gael domination. But there are still big problems with this.

First, the category of 'Independents' covers all sorts of people ranging from Lucinda Creighton, who is really a right wing Fine Gaeler, and Michael Healy-Rae, really a clientalist Fianna Failer, to left wing socialists like Richard Boyd Barrett and Paul Murphy. Second Sinn Fein's record in the North where, in coalition with the right wing DUP, it has implemented vicious cuts and austerity including presiding over the installation of 30,000 water meters, suggests it may be willing to make all sorts of compromises in order to get into power.

So the only way to judge such a government is on its commitment to certain basic issues. Would it commit to abolishing water charges, the property tax and the universal social charge- all of which are imposed on low and middle income people – and to taxing the rich instead? Would it be prepared to bring in a substantial wealth tax, to raise corporation tax and to introduce a financial transactions tax on the trading down at the IFSC?

Crucially such a government has to commit to canceling the bank debt and stopping paying €8 billion a year interest on it. There are other things a government working for the people ought to do such as a massive programme of building social housing, creating jobs through a programme of much needed public works, fixing Ireland's broken health service, restoring the damaging cuts to education and the community sector and much else besides. But canceling the debt is absolutely vital not only because its not the debt of the Irish people but because unless this is done we will be back to the same old story of the government saying it 'has no choice' and 'there is no alternative' but more austerity and cuts.

Let's assume that the new government does commit to this and actually starts to implement it there is no doubt that the rich and powerful both in Ireland and internationally will not take this lying down. The Denis O'Briens

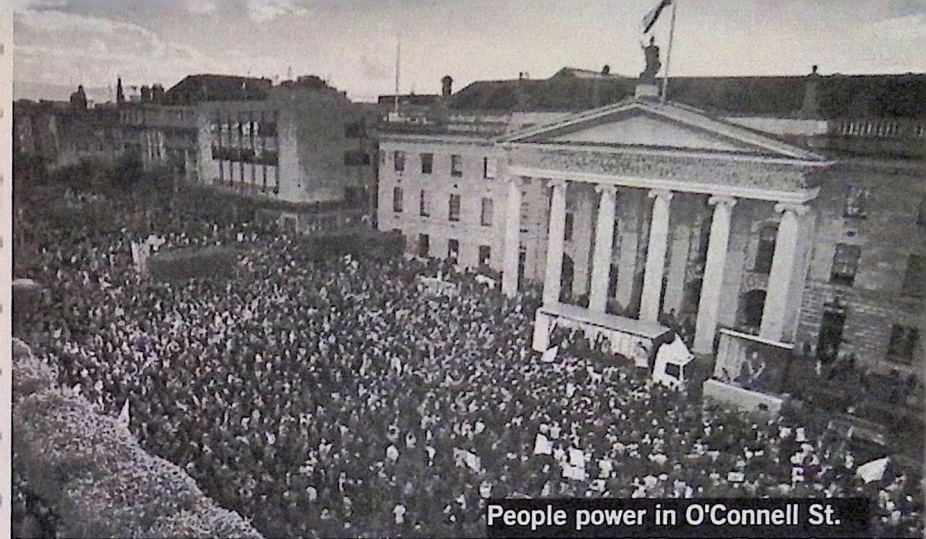
and Dermot Desmonds, the IMF and the European Central Bank, the EU Commission and the multinational corporations will combine to attack this radical government with all the very considerable economic and political power at their disposal. For a start they will try to bankrupt the country by going on investment strike and taking their money abroad.

They will be supported in this assault by large sections of the media. Remember Denis O'Brien owns about half of the Irish media and almost all the rest of it is owned or controlled by very rich people. The newspapers will describe the government as 'loony left', 'extremist', 'communist,' 'sinister', 'anti-democratic' and every other nasty name they can think of. Just look at how they treated a sit down round Joan Burton's car in Tallaght and imagine how they will react to a challenge not only to water meters but to their whole way of running the country.

The top state officials will also try to undermine the government. In 'normal' times, ie with a 'normal' Fianna Fail or Fine Gael government judges, police chiefs, the heads of government departments, the army generals and so on claim to be 'non-political' and neutral. They are happy to do this because they are happy to serve a government that serves their social class. But confronted with a government they see as a threat to the existing system they will work against it and try to make it impossible for it govern.

Faced with all this immense pressure it will not matter how honest or sincere the government leaders are, they will buckle or be destroyed unless they are backed by mass mobilization from below. And that mobilization will have to simultaneously support the government against the rich and the right wing and hold it to democratic account through people's assemblies. In other words we are back to people power.

People power in the sense of mass street demonstrations and people's assemblies cannot afford to ignore 'politics' in the form of elections and government because ignoring these areas simply leaves them in the hands of the rich and the old parties that back the rich. But then politics in the sense of elections and governments based in the Dáil are also not enough to bring real change because the whole system is undemocratic and oppressive. What is needed is people power and politics or rather political people power.



People power in O'Connell St.

PEOPLE POWER AND A POLITICAL ALTERNATIVE

THE fact that many thousands of Irish working people have got a sense of their own power in and through the great revolt against the water charges has completely changed the political landscape in this country.

As we have seen even the official opinion polls show this and anyone who has been part of the movement on the ground cannot fail to be aware of it. But this awakening, this newfound confidence, can fade if it doesn't move beyond a single issue campaign and find expression in a new organized political force.

Irish society and Irish working people are crying out for a political alternative with which to challenge the old parties and the old system. It certainly isn't Lucinda Creighton's plan to 'reboot Ireland' on behalf of small business and it needs to be a better, more socialist, alternative than that offered by Sinn Féin.

But it must not be just another party that says to people vote for us and we'll fix things for you. It has to be part of the movement and grow out of the movement. It has to understand that although elections are important

and necessary, grass roots campaigns, mass demonstrations, workers' strikes and workplace occupations and struggle from below are even more important because they contain the seeds of real democracy and equality for the 21st century.

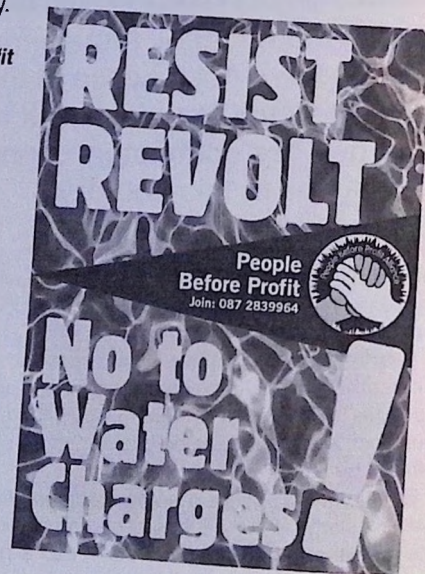
This is what the People Before Profit Alliance stands for and what we in the Socialist Workers Party, which is part of People Before Profit, want to build. And it has to be built, from the bottom up by ordinary people. It won't just magically come into being or appear on the table like 'something we made earlier'. We have to make it ourselves and there has never been a better time to do it.

People Before Profit also wants to see emerging in the coming months a united front of all the serious left forces in Ireland so as to offer the strongest possible challenge to the political establishment at the next election.

At the moment People Before Profit has one TD, Richard Boyd Barrett, and fifteen councillors. All of them are actively involved in the Right2Water campaign and many other campaigns. All of them are grass roots fighters for working class people. But we need far more and even more crucially we need far more activists and campaigners in every town and every community in Ireland.

That is why we ask you to join with us in this fight for people power, real democracy and a better society.

To Join People Before Profit
text JOIN to 087 283 9964



SOCIALIST WORKERS PARTY

We Need a Revolution in Ireland

We need to defeat the unjust water charges and get rid of Irish Water. We need to get rid of this rotten Fine Gael/Labour government which has systematically made ordinary people pay for the crisis of the bankers, the bondholders and the rich.

But we need more than this – **we need a revolution.**

We should change our country through 'people power'. We should have popular assemblies in our communities and workplaces to organise our struggles and eventually to run the country itself.

We live in a capitalist system that is based on the ownership and control of the wealth of the country by a small minority of super rich – the likes of Denis O'Brien (personal wealth €4.36 billion), Hilary Weston (€6.25 billion) and Dermot Desmond (€1.45 billion).

This system means that inequality keeps increasing. It leads to one law for the rich and another for the poor. Bankers and politicians get away with robbing the state of millions. Ordinary people go to jail for robbing €20 worth from Tesco.

What we want instead

Instead of a system based on production for profit we want a society based on production for human needs.

That means placing the major industries under public ownership and democratic control by the workers who work in them. It means government investment in useful public works, like building homes, schools and hospitals and fixing the water leaks so that everyone has a job, no one is homeless and no child goes to school hungry.

To get there we need Revolution

The Socialist Workers Party is part of the People Before Profit Alliance. Our members stand for election to parliaments and local councils. We promote our policies and seek to use these forums to encourage movements that rely on 'people power'.

But fundamental change cannot come through these forums alone. This is because real power lies elsewhere in the boardrooms of the banks and corporations. There are also key unelected figures in the state- for example, top civil servants, local authority managers, judges and police chiefs - who are closely linked to big business.

These people won't give up power without a struggle; it will have to be

taken off them by a mass mobilization of the working people like we have had over water charges only even bigger. And it will have to be in the work places as well as the streets because that's where the economic power is.

We will need great demonstrations but also mass strikes and workplace occupations, in factories, schools, supermarkets, train and bus stations, docks, airports.

Revolutionary Organisation

This revolution will be made by the mass of ordinary people themselves, not a party or a group of politicians or an armed militia acting on their behalf. But the revolution will not just happen of itself. It will have to be argued for, prepared and organised.

So to bring about successful revolution we need a revolutionary political organisation and it needs to have roots in every working class community and be part of all the people's struggles.

That is what the Socialist Workers Party stands for and what we are trying to build. We oppose racism, sexism and homophobia and everything that gets in the way of the unity of working people.

If you agree with us please join us.

JOIN THE SOCIALIST WORKERS PARTY

Text JOIN to 086 307 4060

Or fill in this form

Name

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Return to SWP, PO Box 1648, Dublin 8.

Tel: 01 8722682

www.swp.ie

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The great people's revolt against water charges in the autumn of 2014 saw people power on the streets of Ireland on a scale not witnessed in a generation. This pamphlet argues that this people power is not just a challenge to the water charges and the Fine Gael/Labour Government but to the whole political system.

It contains within itself the seeds of a different way of running society, one that is based on real democracy and accountability not professional politicians rising on the backs of the people, attracting votes with cheap promises and then doing the opposite as soon as they get into power.

The pamphlet explains why this is needed and how it could work to produce a much better and fairer society. It also gives examples from the past, both international and Irish, to show that this is a real practical possibility but emphasises that this is something which will need to be actively built and struggled for.

JOHN MOLYNEUX is an activist in the anti-water charges campaign in Dublin, a member of the People Before Profit Alliance and of the Socialist Workers Party. He is the author of a number of books and pamphlets including *The Case for Socialism in Ireland* (2013) and *Blame the Bosses: Not the Foreigners* (2014).



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